

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

ACTION~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

March 10, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM:

RICHARD T. KENNEDY
JOHN D. NEGROPONTE

SUBJECT:

Request for Approval to Conduct a Multi-Battalion Diversionary Operation North and East of the Plain of Jars

Director Helms has sent a memorandum (at Tab A) to you, Under Secretary Irwin, Deputy Secretary Rush, and Admiral Moorer asking for early approval of a new diversionary maneuver by Vang Pao's forces. The operation would seek to utilize our advantage in mobility by helilifting sizable elements of Vang Pao's forces east and north of the PDJ in order to divert the enemy from Long Tieng. The plan is summarized on the map at Tab A-1.

Current indications are that it is merely a matter of time until the North Vietnamese attack Long Tieng in overwhelming force. The NVA forces which countered Vang Pao's earlier diversion southeast of the PDJ have returned westward toward Long Tieng.

The question, then, is whether Long Tieng (and ultimately the Mekong Basin and the RLG) is better defended by using the approximately 5,000 irregulars to strengthen Long Tieng's immediate defenses or by the proposed maneuver. If retained at Long Tieng, they could add strength to the defenses and serve as a reserve. But there is general agreement that Long Tieng itself probably cannot be held if the NVA put all the force they have available into the effort to take it. The real defense will have to be one in depth using the excellent terrain to the south to delay and extract a heavy price for further enemy advances. This is essentially the strategy we have visualized since the start of the dry season, and Godley has moved to be in a position to implement it. Moreover, there is the danger that in static defense the Meo might be destroyed as an effective force, even if they succeeded in holding Long Tieng.

25X1

NSS, OSD and JCS
reviews completed

25X1

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

- 2 -

Alternatively, the proposed operation seeks to defend the base indirectly by threatening the enemy's lines of communications. That the North Vietnamese are sensitive to such attacks was shown by their rapid reaction to Vang Pao's earlier initiative south and east of the PDJ. The earlier effort successfully substituted mobility -- where we have a definite advantage -- for manpower and ordnance; casualties were light and ordnance expenditures conservative. The new proposal would continue to use Vang Pao's forces in the mobile role in which they are most effective, retain the initiative, dissipate some of the enemy's energies and supplies in response, and probably cause him to expose more targets to air attack than otherwise.

There is the risk that the enemy may attack a weakened Long Tieng while this 5,000 man force is maneuvering behind his lines and we will face the difficult task of extricating them. But the chances are at least even that this diversionary effort will take some pressure off of Long Tieng and may even thin out the NVA forces there to an extent which would diminish the likelihood of a successful assault against the defenses. We believe that this chance argues for going along with the plan.

The U.S. Commander 7/13 AF assesses the risk to the 5-9 CH-53 helicopters which would be flying to support the operation as moderate to high from possible enemy reaction in planned landing zones and possible AA fire along some of the proposed flight paths. Flak suppression sorties will be used to lessen the risk.

All elements of the American Mission concur in the plan, and Ambassador Godley urges early approval so that the helilift can get underway no later than March 10. Director Helms suggests telephonic concurrence and no WSAG meeting unless we see serious problems with the plan. Admiral Moorer favors the plan. State favors the plan and recommends approval. (Sullivan wants to use approval to force the issue of whether we go for an increase in the ceiling. The added cost of about \$95 thousand clearly will have no effect on the ceiling and we consider this a red-herring.) Secretary Laird has withheld judgment pending further JCS assessment of possible U.S. helo losses, overall level of U.S. support required for the operation, and plans for extricating the force if it gets into trouble (This assessment is to be provided to Mr. Laird today.).

We believe the likely gains outweigh the costs and risks. The previous operation of this type accomplished the purpose at little cost to the attacking force and this one has as good a chance to succeed as the earlier one. Accordingly, we believe we should agree with Godley.

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

3

RECOMMENDATION:

That you concur in the operation and authorize us to inform Director Helms.

Approve 

Disapprove, schedule WSAG meeting _____

Other _____

SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

Page Denied